

Methodist Episcopal Church of Milford  
Township (Pleasant Grove Community  
Church)  
4 miles east of Gilbert, on County Road  
E-23, just west of U. S. Route 35  
Gilbert vicinity  
Story County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-119

HABS

IDA, ,

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF MILFORD TOWNSHIP  
(PLEASANT GROVE COMMUNITY CHURCH)

HABS No. IA-119

Location: Four miles east of Gilbert, Story County, on County  
Road E-23 and just west of Interstate Highway 35.

Present Owner: Pleasant Grove Community Church

Present Use: Church and Sunday school

Significance: One of the earliest churches extant in this part of the  
state; a typical small rural church in excellent condition.

PART 1.

HISTORY

Dates of Construction:

A wooden plaque at the front gable shows 1873 along with the present name of the church, indicating that the plaque is not original. The land on which the church is built was acquired in 1874 (4, p. 582). A survey made on 1 June 1874 is recorded and its map does not show a building on the church lot (6, p. 28). A handwritten report of 1964 on Methodist activity in the locality in the nineteenth century states that the building was erected around 1874 (1, p. 2). In the absence of further documentation, this last date seems to be the most reasonable.

Chronology:

- 1872                      Estimating committee appointed (1, p. 2)
- 1874   June 16          Site purchased (4, p. 582)
- 1874   Dec. 19          The church was completed by this date (1, p. 10).
- 1877   Jan. 23          Additional land was acquired for the church cemetery  
                              (5, p. 371).
- Late 1910  
to 1939                  During this period, the church was at first closed  
                              for seven years, then reopened for a time, and then  
                              closed from 1933 to 1939 (2, p. 4).
- 1939                      The church was reopened again, painting and maintenance  
                              work was done, and electricity was installed (2, p. 4).
- About 1941                The church cellar and a new foundation were built, and  
                              later a furnace was installed, replacing two wood-  
                              burning stoves (2, p. 4).
- Early 1950's              The church lacked a minister and closed (2, p. 5).
- 1960                      The church was reopened (2, p. 5).
- 1962   June 12          The church was incorporated as Pleasant Grove Community  
                              Church (3.1, p. 527).
- 1967                      An altar was built, a new gas furnace was installed  
                              (replacing the earlier furnace), and the cellar was  
                              cleaned and painted (2, p. 5)
- 1968   June              The church was repainted (2, p. 5).

Architect or designer:

Unknown.

Survey, 1 June 1874, recorded 17 June 1874 in Story County, Iowa  
(6, p. 28). Surveyed by R. H. Mitchell, County Surveyor, at the request

of T. R. Hughes.

The diagram of the survey shows three lots cut from the northeast corner of the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 7, Township 84, Range 23, W of the 5th PM.

The lots are described as follows:

Lot 1, Schoolhouse, 0.51 acre

Lot 2, Graveyard, 0.55 acre

Lot 3, Church lot, 0.45 acre

Lot 4, 38.50 acres [This is the remainder of the land].

Warranty Deed, 16 June 1874, filed 17 June 1874 in Story County, Iowa (4, p. 582).

Thomas R. Hughes and Eleanor Hughes, his wife

to

Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Milford Twp.

For \$25. Lot No. 3 in NE quarter of the NE quarter of Section 7, Township 84, Range 23, W of the 5th PM. 0.45 acre. For church purposes. If the lot ceases to be so used, it shall then revert to the seller's legal representatives. [This is the site of the church building and is one of three small lots at the northeast corner of Section 7].

Warranty Deed, 23 Jan. 1877, filed 6 Dec. 1877 in Story County, Iowa, Deed Record 27, p. 371.

Thomas R. Hughes

to

Trustees of Pleasant Grove Methodist Episcopal Church

For \$20. Lot Nos. 1 through 39 inclusive, being in Lot No. 2 in the

NE quarter of the NE quarter of Section 7, Township 84, Range 23, W of the 5th PM. Surveyed 1 June 1874. [This land adjoins the Church lot on the north. The many small lots, averaging 610 square feet in area, were cemetery plots.]

Original and subsequent names:

In the deed of 1874 the church was called the Methodist Episcopal Church of Milford Township. Later, however, the name became Pleasant Grove Methodist Episcopal Church, commonly shortened to the Pleasant Grove Chapel, and later yet it was known as the Little White Church in the Oaks (2, p. 3). In 1962 the church was incorporated as the Pleasant Grove Community Church, (3.1, p. 527).

Contractors and suppliers:

The church was constructed by fifty families who erected the building with their own labor. They were the families of:

George W. Sowers	John Elaberger
F. T. McLain	Ammon Hipsher
Frank Curtis	James Yelton
William Hayman	T. K. Soper
Charles Minkler	Joe Anderson
Hiraw Minkler	Fritz Randau
George B. Kooser	George Alfred
Jacob Kooser	Jacob E. Hoover
William Gilmore	A. Prime
Soloman Young	John Decker
Thomas Hughes	John Skelton
Sineure Adams	John Harnden

Joe Sketon	Ed Wilkenson
Wesley Arrasmith	James Brown
T. B. Howland	Amos Spring
Daniel Stultz	B. F. Adams
John Rich	Hiram Fergeson
Richard Kimbal	Harry Boyce
Hiram Square	Jim Brohard
Russell Ballard	Dad Lenin
Henry Ballard	John Carr
Rogal Sheffield	Jacob Born
Morris Nash	Jon H. Kegley
James Dodds	William Goldsmith
Robert Dodds	John James

Historical events and persons associated with the building:

The people in the Gilbert and Pleasant Grove vicinity had been holding church services in a "little red schoolhouse" as early as 1856 (2, p. 1). The first indication of efforts towards the construction of a new church was given in the minutes of the Conference Reports of the Bloomington Circuit for January 4, 1872. These minutes note the appointment of an estimating committee consisting of Wakefield, Warrick and Smith (1, pp.2-3).

Possibly in 1873, construction work was begun before formal legal acquisition of land. This date is not documented. The church's land was acquired in two phases: first, acquisition of the site for the church building on 16 June 1874 (4, p. 582); and second, acquisition for the church cemetery on 23 January 1877 (5, p. 371). Construction in 1874

after acquisition of the lot is likely. The church was declared substantially paid for on December 19, 1874 by Rev. Antemus Brown, the first minister (1, p. 3).

In its first years, the church had difficulty in paying its minister a salary. A note in 1882 indicates that the Sunday school was in decline; in 1883 it was closed (1, pp. 5-6).

Services in the church continued uninterrupted from pioneer days until the First World War. The war made a big difference in church attendance. The boys were called away to serve and parents of the young men were so despondent they seemed to give up. One of the boys from the church was killed in the war and the church closed, and remained closed for a period of 7 years (2, p. 4).

The church was opened in the 1920's for services and Sunday school until 1933, when it closed again owing to small attendance (2 p. 4).

In 1939, after - so goes the sentimental story - a small girl, Doloris Wilson, pleaded to Rev. Lookingbill for a place to go to Sunday school, the church was again reopened. Subsequently the church held a "busy bee day" during which the church was painted on the outside, washed on the inside, and the seats and woodwork inside were painted. Soon afterward the church exterior was painted a second coat, wallpaper was hung inside, and electricity was installed (2, p. 4).

About 1941 the church was raised up, and a cellar was dug by hand shoveling and a team of horses. The church was then lowered on a new concrete block foundation which had been built. Subsequently, a furnace was installed (2, p. 4).

Owing to the failing health of Rev. Lookingbill and the fact that another minister could not be found, the church was again closed in the early 1950's until 1960 when Rev. Hector Thompson reopened the

church (2, p. 5). Mr. Trueblood built the church altar in 1967 and in the same year the men of the congregation installed a new gas furnace and repainted the basement (2, p. 5).

Subsequent improvement included a repainting of the church on June 15, 1968 (2, p. 5).

PART 2.

DESCRIPTION

Condition of the Fabric:

Excellent both interior and exterior.

Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

Estimated (paced): 25 feet wide by 40 feet long; 30 feet high.

2. Number of bays:

Two in front, four at sides.

3. Number of stories:

One story with an attic and a cellar.

4. Layout shape:

Rectangular.

5. Foundation:

Concrete block in running bond.

6. Wall construction:

Wood frame construction. Exterior siding is clapboard with about 4 to 4 1/2 inches exposed. The siding is painted white and



is nailed 16 inches on center with wire nails.

7. Structural system:

Wood frame.

8. Porches:

In front of both entrance doors there are stoops of concrete resting on a larger concrete slab elevated above ground level. There is no roof shelter. There is an iron grate resting on the ground serving as a stoop for the side entrance door.

9. Chimneys:

There is a red brick chimney outside of the back wall of the building. The chimney runs full height on the exterior and is approximately 20 inches wide and 16 inches deep through its entire height, except at the bottom where it flares wider.

10. Doorways and doors:

There are two front entrance doors of wood, both with aluminum storm doors and with small transoms. Each wooden door has six vertical panels, three above three, with the upper group of panels about twice the height of the lower group. There is also a conventional five- or six-panel side entrance door with no transom.

11. Windows and shutters:

The first floor sashes on the sides of the church are painted white and have no shutters. These windows are all double hung, each half with four panes of glass. The center vertical millions of the sashes are thicker than the horizontal millions. These windows are also covered with aluminum frame exterior storm windows.

There are windows in the cellar and these windows and the sashes are also painted white and covered with storm windows, have three panes in each and are not double hung. Each basement window has two vertical muntins.

12. Roof shape and covering:

The roof is a steeply pitched gable with the ridge line running parallel with the long dimension of the plan. The pitch is approximately 45 degrees. The roofing is wood shingles.

13. Cornice, eaves:

The underside of the roof overhang is enclosed. There are metal gutters and downspouts.

Description of the interiors:

1. Floor plans:

The church is rectangular with a central aisle and a side aisle at each side exterior wall. The pews are arranged facing the pulpit and altar. The chancel is divided from the nave by a four section altar rail running in a straight line between the two side walls. The chancel contains an aisle centered altar against the wall and a pulpit to the right of the altar as one faces the altar. The side entrance door in the right sidewall allows entry onto a landing with stairs leading down to the basement. The stair forms an "L" shape in plan.

One descends into the cellar on the stairway along the right sidewall into the multipurpose fellowship area. Beyond the multipurpose area on the right is the kitchen and on the left is the mechanical and storage room.

2. Stairways:

The stairway leading from the nave down to the basement is L-shaped in plan and made of wood. Down 3 risers from the nave level is the landing for the side entrance door. Then turning left and down 9 more risers is a bifold door leading directly to the basement.

3. Flooring:

The floor of the nave is wood planks about 5 inches wide and varnished. The center aisle and the chancel are carpeted in a low-nap green carpet. The floor of the basement is covered with light colored resilient flooring tile in the multipurpose room and with dark resilient flooring tile in the kitchen. The floor of the mechanical room is exposed concrete.

4. Wall and ceiling finishes:

The walls of the sanctuary are covered with green and gray speckled wallpaper on wallboard. There is a pointed gray wood wainscot up each wall approximately 3 feet. The walls in the basement are concrete block painted a blue-green color. The ceiling of the sanctuary is of white painted planks about 5" wide running the length of the building.

At the first floor the entrance doors and frames are painted gray on the inside. Doors in the basement are painted blue green. At the first floor the window frames are painted gray on the inside; in the basement they are painted blue green.

5. Special decorative features, trim and cabinetwork:

Numerous sizes and types of religious pictures are hung on

the walls of the sanctuary. The pew ends consist of a carved scroll. The trim mouldings around the heads of windows and doors extend across the top of the opening, partially down each side, and then out onto the wall a short distance, forming a "label."

6. Mechanical equipment

The church has been wired for electricity and is heated by a gas-fired, Lennox brand forced air system.

Site and surroundings:

The front of the church faces south of the site as one faces the front of the church and a cemetery to the rear of the church. The site has numerous deciduous trees and is surrounded by an old metal fence about three feet high with pipe posts and top rail and ornamental wire fabric.

Credits

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Reviewed for HABS by Druscilla J. Null 1983

PART III.

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